

55010

Fx 3/276/p

A LETTER

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
LORD STANLEY,

AND THE OTHER
VISITING JUSTICES,

OF THE
LUNATIC ASYLUM,

FOR THE
COUNTY OF LANCASTER.

By PAUL, SLADE KNIGHT, M.D.

(Formerly a Surgeon in the Royal Navy)

SUPERINTENDENT, SURGEON, and TREASURER, of the said
ASYLUM.

Lancaster :

PRINTED BY WILLIAM MINSHULL,
GREAT JOHN-STREET, FRIARAGE;
AND SOLD BY
MESSRS. LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
LONDON.

1822.
—
—



My LORD AND GENTLEMEN,

THE motives for publishing and addressing to you this Letter, will, it is conceived, be readily found in the Letter itself; and the writer entertains a hope that it may lead to the enacting of Laws which shall render much more efficient the benevolent Acts already in force. Be this as it may, so strong is his conviction of the practicability and usefulness of the alterations suggested, that he should deem himself unworthy the serious and important trust reposed in him, were he to withhold a communication, having, as he believes, a direct tendency to alleviate, in a great degree, a misery, which, when the individual wretchedness of the sufferer, and the collective distress of his friends, are taken into account, may safely be pronounced, the most afflictive that man is heir to.

County Lunatic Asylums for the cure and better care and custody of Lunatics and dangerous Idiots, being paupers, and also, under certain regulations, for the cure and better

care and custody of the more wealthy, were first authorised to be erected by Act of Parliament in the 48th Year of his late most excellent Majesty.

Several subsequent Acts have been passed either to enlarge or amend the 48th Geo. 3d. and it is the opinion of very competent judges that there is still room for important improvement.

At the present time there is a power to commit *any* Criminal Lunatic to County Lunatic Asylums, and there is also authority to order and enforce payment of the weekly rate fixed on by the Visiting Justices, for any criminal Lunatic so committed who becomes insane *before* conviction; but there is no authority to enforce payment of the weekly rate for any such individual whose insanity occurs *after* conviction, altho' the 56 G. 3. Cap. 117. gives authority for the commitment.

Again, a Pauper may have been committed to the custody of the proper Officer of the Lunatic Asylum for any County, and after commitment may become entitled to an income

more than sufficient to defray all the expenses incurred for care, maintenance, clothing, and medical attendance; yet, a lunatic thus circumstanced, must, notwithstanding, still remain in the Asylum as a Pauper, until a majority of the Visiting Justices grant an order for discharge, conformably to the 48th Geo. 3d. Cap. 96. Sec. 23. or till the Justices assembled at the General Quarter Sessions, or General Annual Sessions, order a discharge, conformably to the 51st Geo. 3d. Sect. 5. Cap. 79. This, by some, has been thought a great hardship and injustice, but it is more than probable that the opinion has arisen from the want of some adequate authority whereby the Justices might ascertain, upon good and unequivocal testimony, that the Lunatic has ceased to be a Pauper; and has become possessed of, or will be entitled to, property sufficient for his support; and, on the other hand, from the want of any legal power whereby the relatives or next of kin might demand to give evidence of such Lunatic having ceased to be a Pauper, and upon proof to that effect being given, might

claim his discharge.—The friends of a Lunatic have repeatedly expressed extreme dissatisfaction at his detention when they have professed to be able and willing to take him under their own care and protection.—And on the other hand, the visiting Justices, for want of satisfactory evidence, have resolved that he should remain where they knew he was under proper care. It certainly seems unjust, that a Husband, Wife, Father, Mother, Son, Daughter, Brother, or Sister, might not be enabled to command the release of a relative under certain humane provisions. Perhaps if power were granted to two Magistrates acting in and for any County (one of whom should be one of the Magistrates who committed the Lunatic whose liberation is requested) to take evidence touching the non-pauperism, and the competency of means for the proper support of any Lunatic confined as a pauper, and upon being satisfied of such competency, to issue an order for his liberation, every desired object would be attained;—copies of the evidence and order being sent by the two Ma-

gistrates to the Clerk of the Peace, or his Deputy, to be by him laid before the Justices of the Peace acting in and for the County, at their next General Quarter Sessions of the Peace, or General Annual Session.

Any two Magistrates acting in and for any County, committing a *Pauper Lunatic* belonging to any Parish within such County, and wherein a *Lunatic Asylum* for the County shall have been erected, are required to issue their warrant to the Overseer of such Parish, for the payment of the weekly rate fixed on by the Visiting Justices of the Asylum, for the maintenance, care, clothing, and medicine, of such poor Lunatic, and thus the Parish becomes answerable to the Asylum for the payment of the weekly rate; but from the apathy, and want of intelligence of many of the Overseers, and from the great distance from the Asylum of many of the Parishes, it becomes both expensive and extremely difficult to collect the Money due from them; the expense of postage alone frequently amounting to more than $2\frac{1}{2}$ per Cent. and the accounts, which should be discharged quar-

terly, are frequently not paid for one, two, or perhaps three years, or even longer ; and this state of things is rendered still worse by the disappointments, and consequent dissatisfaction, of the tradesmen of the Asylum, and the higher prices by them demanded for long credit, and uncertain periods of payment ; by which alone a serious loss is sustained. But, on the other hand, any two Magistrates issuing their Warrant for the commitment of a *Vagrant Lunatic* to a County Asylum, give also an order on the Treasurer for the County, conformably to the 48th G. 3d. Cap. 96. Sec. 20. for the payment of the weekly rate. A quarterly list is sent by the Treasurer for the Asylum to the County Treasurer, of all the Vagrant Lunatics, admitted, discharged, and remaining in the Asylum, during that quarter, with the charge for maintenance, &c. for each Vagrant. This account, being previously provided for out of the County Rolls, is promptly discharged, without further expense or trouble ; and if it were practicable to pay for all the Pauper Lunatics belonging to

Parishes within the County in the *same manner*, the financial concerns of the Asylums would be brought into a narrow compass, and would go on much more smoothly and economically than they can possibly do on the present system ; besides which, in a cycle, there would be a considerable saving to each Parish ; and that this may be certainly effected with incalculable advantages to the poor objects, would appear from the following argument.—So soon as any Overseer finds a *Vagrant Lunatic* in his Parish, he is immediately interested in giving information to the two nearest Magistrates, who thereon, if they deem it expedient, issue their warrant for the removal of the Lunatic to the Asylum, and the expense of maintaining such Lunatic is immediately shifted from the Parish, and falls on the County at large : Now, if the same law were adopted with Pauper Lunatics *belonging to Parishes within the County*, altho' the County rates would thereby be increased, yet in reality the expenses to the Parishes would be lessened in proportion to the dimi-

nished expense of collecting the rate, and the greater economy with which the Asylum Supplies would be contracted for ; and the trouble to the Treasurer for the County would be precisely what it is at present ; or it may, trifling as it is, as respects the Asylums, be yet reduced ; for on an inspection of the expenditure of an Asylum for any given Quarter, the Visiting Justices, having first audited and allowed the accounts, may have authority to issue their order to the County Treasurer for the amount of the whole expenditure of that Quarter, such amount not being *more* than fourteen Shillings weekly for each Patient then in the Asylum, as already fixed by the 48th G. 3. Cap. 96. S. 24. and thus the accounts for maintenance, &c. of the Patients, would be put on the same footing that the accounts for building and furnishing always have been, and so being brought into a very narrow compass, would be easily examined, and much better checked, than at present ; for now the Quarterly accounts of the Asylum with the parishes for every individual Pa-

tient, make an aggregate mass of large bulk, and require considerable time and attention to be properly examined ; a circumstance of very serious objection to all accounts that are submitted to the inspection of the Magistracy ; for it cannot be reasonably expected that independent Gentlemen will be always found ready, gratuitously to give their time and attention to the tedious examination of accounts that would require many days of very close application accurately to inspect.

And last, but not least in importance, the cause of humanity, it is presumed, would be very greatly advanced by this method of proceeding. There is too much reason to believe, that, at the present time, hundreds of Poor Lunatics are confined in Work-houses, in a very improper manner, and some in a most shocking state of neglect. A Room upon the Ground, with inequalities in the Floor, which consisted only of earth, and puddles of dirty water in the hollows, the windows either all broken or unglazed, and a little straw, formed day and night

the whole accommodation for a wretched Idiot, till death, a few months since, closed the disgraceful scene. Unfortunately, it appears to be the interest of those who are most likely to witness these scenes, to wink at them ; the wretched Idiot, with his truss of straw, and the infuriated Maniac, chained to his block, can be so kept at the Workhouse, for nearly or even less than half the sum for which they can be properly managed and maintained at a County Asylum, and thus an *apparent* saving of three, four, or perhaps five, or even ten shillings per week, tempts to the withholding the unhappy sufferer ; and the melancholy consequence is, that thus a direct saving of from ten to twenty, or it may be thirty pounds a year, is made for the payers of Parish rates, by letting the poor unfortunate sufferer remain in the Parish Workhouse ; and so a kind of Parish secret is created ; the event of a Pauper becoming insane is kept as quiet as possible, *till, probably by mismanagement, the Lunatic, that might at first have been easily recovered, becomes permanently deranged,* and not till the poor

sufferer becomes outrageous or extremely offensive, or till impending Death threatens to close the scene, do they at last perform their duty ; and then they would “really rather “ the Patient should be taken to the Asylum, “ since they can do no good with him !” At length perhaps the tardy preparations are commenced, and in the course of time, when it is quite convenient (perhaps weeks after the order has been issued by the Magistrates) the patient is sent, but not till the disease has made alarming and frequently irreparable inroads on the constitution ; and probably a chronic state of disordered bodily health, with perpetual alienation of mind, is the still more melancholy lot of the victim. This is not an ideal picture ; it is drawn from many originals, and the truth of the main facts is forced on my conviction almost hourly. Two cases, from their very recent occurrence, are selected out of the many to be met with in this Asylum :—No. 429, a Woman, was admitted a Patient on the 28th February last ; she says she is married, and has two children ; the “queries” which are

required to be answered by the medical person who certifies the insanity, were in this rare instance attended to: from hence it appears, that "she is 25 years old, that she "has had no medical advice since the 19th "March, 1819, at which time she shewed "slight symptoms of insanity, which have "continued without intermission; that she "has been afflicted with no particular bodily "infirmity, *except four or five attacks of spitting of Blood.*" When this Patient was admitted into the Asylum, she was in a state of extreme debility and bodily disease, and labouring under symptoms of consumption of the lungs.

No. 391. A Man, was admitted a Patient the 3d of August last. The following is an authentic account of what took place previously to the information being given by the Overseer to a Justice of the Peace, of the man's insanity. He had been deranged some time, had twice attempted suicide, and not till the Overseer was threatened, by the worthy Rector of the Parish, with the penalty inflicted by the Law, did he venture to apply

to a Magistrate for a warrant, to convey the unfortunate Man to the Asylum: but even this backwardness on the part of the Overseer has not screened him from the heavy reproaches of the Gentlemen, so they were called, of the Parish. This Overseer was at the Asylum only a few days since, for the express purpose of ascertaining if it were possible to get the man discharged; he appeared harassed, and stated, that he was much blamed for not preventing the removal of the Patient to the Asylum, although he urged in his defence the penalty he was liable to, and with which he had been threatened. On these cases no comment is necessary, they are fac-similies of many, and a repetition would be only painful tautology.

That this state of things exists at this day, is, I fear, to be chiefly attributed to the avarice of individuals; and could this passion be safely pressed into the cause of humanity, I apprehend an immense good would result to the most unfortunate of all sufferers, and also that the objects of the Legislature would thereby be more effectually answered

than at present. Let the expense of maintaining Lunatics belonging to any Parish in the County, for which any County Lunatic Asylum shall have been or shall be built, be defrayed out of the County rates, in the manner above suggested, and then the Overseers and Parishioners would instantly, on the manifestation of insanity in any poor Person, be interested in sending him to the Asylum for the County ; and the advantages resulting to the unhappy Lunatics, will, I doubt not, be such as to afford a rich reward to any one who shall labour in effecting this object.

It has been asserted by more than one experienced Physician, that no less a number than nine out of ten Lunatics recover, when subjected to a judicious treatment speedily after the first attack, or manifestation of disease : If this be true, what a melancholy picture do our Asylums present under the present system ! One half the whole amount is, I fear, nearly the utmost number that recover ; and, under all circumstances, even this must be considered a very large propor-

tion ; but as to those incarcerated in Workhouses, what becomes of *them*? No man knows.—It would be well to have a return of all the Lunatics confined in Workhouses, or other unfit places, for the last five or ten years, stating what *has* become of them ; this would at once enable us to make a tolerably correct estimate of the effect of confining Lunatics in Workhouses, since we must conclude, that all Paupers would immediately on the manifestation of derangement, be placed under the management of the medical person who attends the Workhouse, and therefore, according to the experience of some Physicians, nine out of ten would recover.

This plan, no doubt, has its inconveniences, and tendencies to abuse, for the same spirit of avarice that now withdraws from, would under this proposed system, thrust upon the Asylums, every poor creature that can in any way be construed to be insane, and so the House might be crowded with improper objects ; but the 51st G. 3d. expressly provides against any inconvenience arising from this cause ; it has been anticipated by the bene-

volent framer of the Acts in force, who doubtless measured the philanthropy of others by the standard in his own breast ! And here is presumptive evidence that they judge erroneously who conclude that County Lunatic Asylums were intended chiefly for the safe custody of poor *incurable* Lunatics. Now altho' it is highly proper that such Lunatics should be sheltered here, yet common sense will tell every man, possessing it, that the arrangements of these establishments must be every way the best calculated for the safe and proper detention of the *curable* Lunatic, and that the superintendents and medical Officers, and assistants, who make the proper treatment of Lunatics their daily study and practice, and who have great experience, are at least as likely to know the most probable means of cure as any other set of persons whatever !

These opinions and suggestions are offered with great deference ; they have not been formed hastily, nor without much experience; should they lead in any way to the further amelioration of the still peculiarly

wretched lot of the pauper Lunatic, should they be the cause of rescuing only one individual from perpetual insanity, and restoring him to the bosom of his family, I shall rejoice, and be grateful, that my labour has not been fruitless.

I am, My Lord and Gentlemen,

With great respect,

Your most obedient, humble servant,

PAUL SLADE KNIGHT, M. D.

